

## Lions No. 10 in first BCS standings

By VITO FORLENZA  
Collegian Staff Writer



Penn State is No. 10 in the first-ever Bowl Championship Series rankings, and coach Joe Paterno is acting as if he doesn't have a clue that the inaugural standings were even released.

"I don't even know what is going on with the poll," Paterno said at yesterday's weekly press conference. "I really don't pay much attention to any of that stuff. My feeling has been that we should not have preseason polls, and we shouldn't have polls until we play five or six games. Is this the poll that they are going to eventually use to pick the No. 1 and No. 2 team?"

Paterno, echoing the majority of

college football coaches, later said he is willing to give the BCS system a chance, but that support still hasn't deterred him from advocating a playoff system.

The BCS rankings, released Monday night, resulted from a combined effort by representatives of the NCAA, college football's six major conferences and Notre Dame.

The rankings are an attempt to crown a national champion within

the present bowl system as opposed to shaping a playoff format.

The Nittany Lions (5-1, 2-1 Big Ten) are still three wins away from qualifying for any of the BCS participants (the Rose, Sugar and Orange Bowls and the Fiesta Bowl — site of this year's national championship), but meet the alliance's second condition, a top-12 ranking. A second-place finish in the Big Ten wouldn't guarantee the Lions in alliance bid.

If No. 1 Ohio State finishes atop the polls and plays for the national title, the second place Big Ten team does not get an automatic invitation to the Rose Bowl.

Bowls that lose teams to the championship game, the Rose Bowl included, get to choose from the

remaining teams that meet BCS conditions.

So while the Rose Bowl still pits the Big Ten and Pac-10 winners, it does not have to retain those conference ties if it loses a team to the title game.

When bowls lose teams for the national title game, the bowl that loses the highest-ranked team gets the first selection of the remaining teams.

That scenario seems to indicate the Rose Bowl would have the top two picks, since Ohio State and the Pac-10's UCLA currently are ranked No. 1 and 2 in both major polls.

Just one more? Last week, the NCAA Div. I Management Council addressed the possibility of a 12-game schedule,

which would begin by 2002. Paterno said he thinks players could handle another scheduled game, but he cautioned that many teams already play a 12-game schedule with conference championship games and preseason games, such as the Kickoff and Pigskin Classics.

"I would hope that they would wait to see what happens with this proposed championship type of thing that somebody had asked me about earlier," Paterno said. "If that works out, then 12 games might be fine."

Paterno added if the BCS system wasn't successful, the NCAA again might want to consider a playoff system that would consist of playing a 10-game regular-season schedule.

### Injury report

Paterno said the Lions are more banged up than he thought they would be coming off a bye week. Wide receiver Joe Nastasi, who broke his left wrist in the Lions' 27-17 win at Minnesota, is still out and may miss an additional three weeks.

Offensive tackle Jordan Caruso, sidelined with an ankle injury, is listed as probable for Saturday's Illinois contest.

"We only practiced Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and took Friday, Saturday and Sunday off," Paterno said of last week's schedule. "I was hoping we would get some people back. We have some people that are still limping around out there that hopefully will be OK by Saturday."

## WNBA impacting college programs

By DONNIE COLLINS  
Collegian Staff Writer



Two years ago, the Women's National Basketball Association made its presence known in the sports world.

With its catchy "We got next!" slogan and a handful of bona fide star players like Houston's Sheryl Swoopes and Los Angeles' Lisa Leslie, the WNBA set out on its maiden voyage after the NBA Finals in the summer of 1996.

Although it is still a new league on the block, women's professional basketball has made significant strides over the past couple of years.

Competing in a nation where men's sports dominate the attention of the common sports fan, both the WNBA and American Basketball League (ABL) have been able to steal a great portion of the spotlight and garner notable popularity for the women's game.

Before the days of the WNBA and ABL, there was no lack of women's leagues. However, they were all located overseas.

As the notoriety of professional women's leagues in the United States increases, most American-born players have set their sites not on playing professionally abroad, but staying at home.

Because of this, many coaches in the Big Ten said high school players are looking less at education, tradition and environment when they look for the right university at which to play.

Now that playing in the pros and doing it close to home is not only feasible, but probable for the most talented of college players, the college coach's role as a recruiter has taken on some noticeable changes.

Penn State coach Rene Portland said the desire for high school players to go to a program that will get them to the WNBA crept up on her last season.

During her recruiting trips this year, Portland hasn't found any less interest from young players who want to end up in one of the pro leagues.

"Last year was quite a surprise, and this year's recruiting class asked the same question, 'Can you get us to the pro league,'" Portland said. "We have some players in there already, and it's helped us out."

Among Big Ten schools, only Iowa can boast more players competing professionally in the WNBA and ABL than Portland's Lady Lions.

Former Lions Missy Masley and Angie Pothoff are enjoying successful ABL careers with the Colorado Xplosion and Columbus Quest, respectively.

But the Lion who has made the biggest impact in either of the pro leagues is Suzie McConnell Serio, a 31-year-old mother of four who graduated from Penn State in 1988. With the Cleveland Rockers this past season, McConnell Serio earned all-WNBA first-team honors, as well as the league's Newcomer of the Year and Sportsmanship awards.

Portland said McConnell Serio's accomplishments and television exposure helped draw the interest of potential recruits in the Penn State program.

"Suzie did wonderful things for us this summer," Portland said. "Every time they talked about Suzie, they talked about her being a mom, as well as being a Penn State point guard. (WNBA commentator and Connecticut coach) Geno Auriemma did a wonderful job of always talking about Penn State when he talked about Suzie."

The WNBA is not only having an effect on high school seniors and juniors. It is reaching a much younger audience.

At her instructional camps, Michigan coach Sue Guevara said girls preparing to enter high school already have hopes of playing in the WNBA.

"At your camp, 12 and 13 year olds are wearing pro uniforms," Guevara said. "One of the questions you are always asked is, 'How many players do you have in pro leagues?' I think it's been great."

Coaches like Portland, Guevara and Minnesota's Cheryl Littlejohn all use the WNBA as a recruiting tool. It's an especially useful tool for Littlejohn, who stresses to recruits that Minnesota received a WNBA franchise which begins play next summer.

Littlejohn said, however, that it isn't the collegiate program that

**ON DECK**

Tomorrow's Cover Story:  
The journey of former lady cager Shauntal Hall

## Earl returns

### Cager guard takes court for first time since injury

By MICHAEL LELLO  
Collegian Staff Writer

All eyes were on Dan Earl last night as he took the floor of the Bryce Jordan Center for the first time since Dec. 7 of last year, when he and what was supposed to be his senior season came tumbling to the hardwood with a torn anterior cruciate ligament.

Earl, granted a sixth season by the NCAA after taking a medical redshirt last season, started last night's annual Blue-White scrimmage and looked like the same point guard Nittany Lion fans remembered, scoring 12 points in a losing effort for the Blue team, which was outscored 68-52 by White.

Earl was not as satisfied with his performance as most of his observers were, but he admitted it felt good to return to competition.

"I think you can say I'm fairly rusty," Earl said. "But it's nice to run around and go up and down (the court). I'm just a little winded and my leg needs to get more strength."

If Earl had any cobwebs surrounding his offensive game, he dusted them off early, drilling a three-point shot at the top of the arc on the third Blue possession of the first half. On the next two Blue drives, Earl shot both times, nailing a shot just inside the three-point line and barely missing a three-point attempt that just bounced out of the basket.

Earl said he didn't favor the knee, but was aware during the game that he has not yet regained the ability to push and drive off the knee.

"I got to be able to jump off it like its not even there," he said. "Maybe I was a little tentative, but with repetition it'll get there."

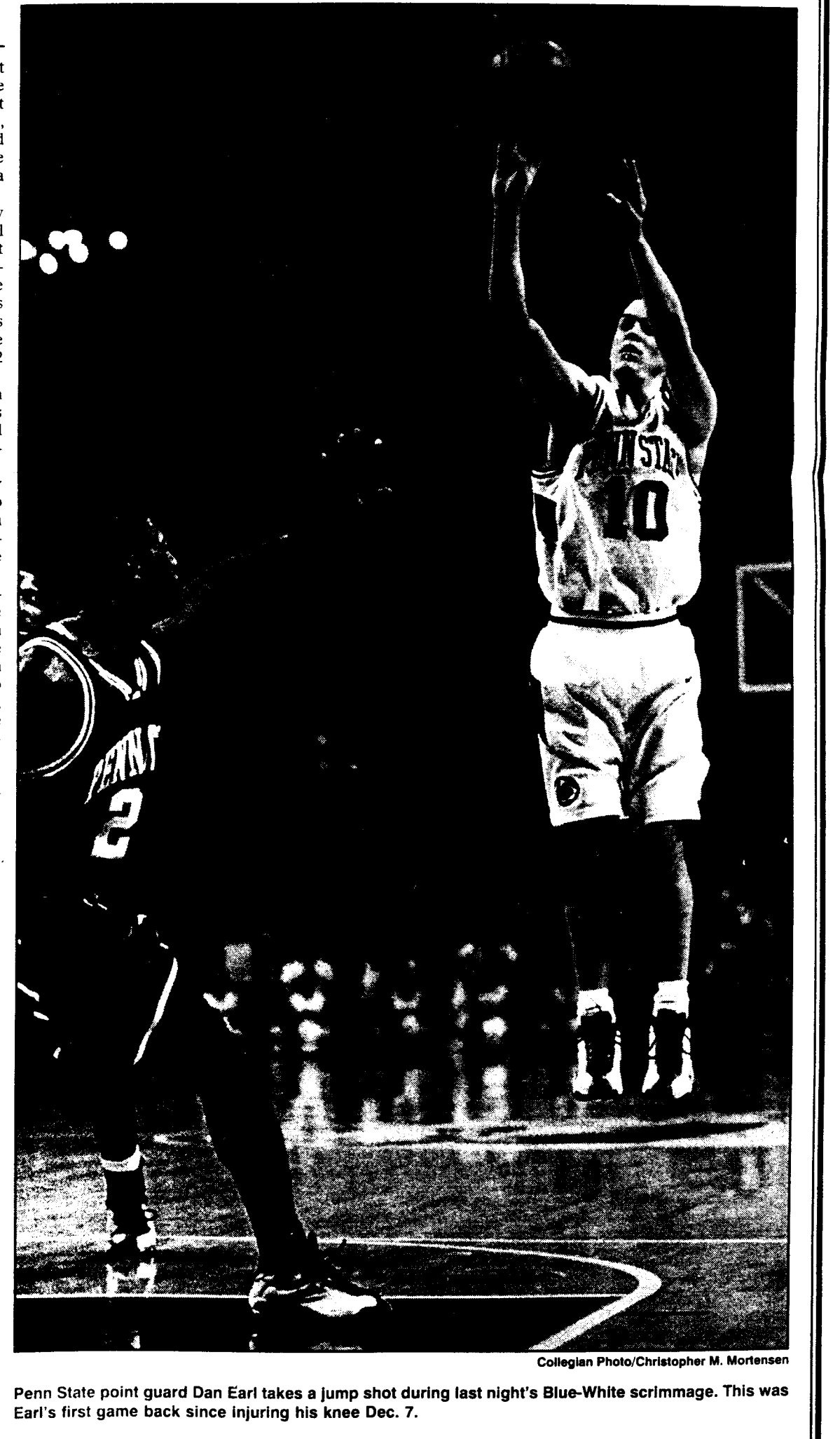
Coach Jerry Dunn was pleased with Earl's 1998-99 debut, considering the team has just begun practices.

"I think that Danny played surprisingly well," Dunn said. "He's practiced three of nine days, and never the whole practice."

Earl will continue to push himself a little further every day he does practice, in hopes of not only practicing a full session but also participating in every practice rather than going every other day as he has been doing thus far.

The team's only senior entering the season in full health, center Calvin Booth scored 14 points and added three blocks before leaving the game in the second half with an injured right ankle. Dunn said he twisted it slightly.

A bright spot for the Lions last Please see EARL, Page 18.



Collegian Photo/Christopher M. Mortensen

Penn State point guard Dan Earl takes a jump shot during last night's Blue-White scrimmage. This was Earl's first game back since injuring his knee Dec. 7.

## Darling to guide backcourt into new lady cager season

Editor's Note: This is the first in a three-part series previewing the women's basketball team. The story features the guards.

By WILLIAM KALEC  
Collegian Staff Writer

When point guard Helen Darling walked off the floor of the Ferrell Center last March following the Penn State women's basketball team's 59-56 victory over Baylor, she had done more than contribute to the Lady Lions' first ever Women's National Invitation Tournament crown.

She also proved an age-old adage wrong. In front of 10,057 loud and ravenous Baylor basketball fanatics, Darling was able to

keep her poise. She didn't let the crowd noise bother her as she continued directing traffic from the point guard position — she was the one running the show.

And when all was said and done, Darling disproved the saying "Great leaders are born, not made."

"The postseason did a lot for our confidence and leadership," coach Rene Portland said. "You saw Helen, who gives people fits at point guard, but still a growing point guard, start to understand what leadership is. And she was only a sophomore."

Now a year older and wiser, Darling will be the focal point of this year's Lady Lion backcourt that is as deep with talent as any in the Big Ten. Her exploits in the postsea-

son earned her WNIT Most Valuable Player accolades as she led all Lions by averaging 16 points over the four tournament games.

After developing a taste for championship play last season, Darling enters the 1998-99 campaign as hungry as ever.

"Everyone is looking forward to this season; everyone's real excited," Darling said. "I know I'm ready. Every time I go to the floor I try to play like I did in the tournament — just being a leader and playing within my game."

Darling's game is not one dimensional as she frequently displayed over the course of last season. She can generate points with her shooting as well as her

uncanny ability to find the open player. Darling averaged close to five assists per game last season, while at the same contributing to the Lions' rebounding cause. Despite her 5-foot-7 frame, Darling led the Lions in rebounding on six different occasions last year.

Joining Darling in the backcourt will be fellow co-captain Christine Portland, now a senior, who will help fill the void left by the graduation of Jamie Parsons.

Portland, who started every game last season, will now be asked to carry more of the Lions' offensive load and improve on her 7.4 points per game average from a year ago.

The Lions have an abundance of talent

after the two captains are spoken for, led by Big Ten all-freshman team nominee Lisa Shepherd.

Although Shepherd did not start a single game last season, she still saw quality playing time and finished second on the team in scoring, averaging 10.3 points per game.

Shepherd, along with reserve Chrissy Falcone and newcomers Katrena Carr and junior college transfer Shawnta Vanzant, will give Penn State a playing time dilemma most teams would love to have.

"Our team is very versatile at the guard position," coach Portland said. "We're six deep in our guards, and I'll be able to play all six of them during the season."